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(71) Applicant: **KIMBERLY-CLARK WORLDWIDE, INC.** [US/US]; 401 N. Lake Street, Neenah, WI 54956 (US).

(72) Inventors: **BRUEMMER-PRESTLEY, Mary, Anne**; 418 East Pershing Street, Appleton, WI 54911 (US). **FREIBURGER, Sarah, Jane, Marie**; 2708 Welhouse Drive, Kaukauna, WI 54130 (US). **BORDAIN, Nefetari, Edris**; 5508 Treelodge Parkway, Dunwoody, GA 30350 (US). **SCHMOKE, Suzanne, Marie**; 4212 Brooks Road, Oshkosh, WI 54904 (US). **FELL, David, Arthur**; 2055 Lynn Drive, Neenah, WI 54956 (US).

(74) Agents: **CONNELLY, Thomas, J. et al.**; Kimberly-lark Worldwide, Inc., 401 N. Lake St., Neenah, WI 54956 (US).

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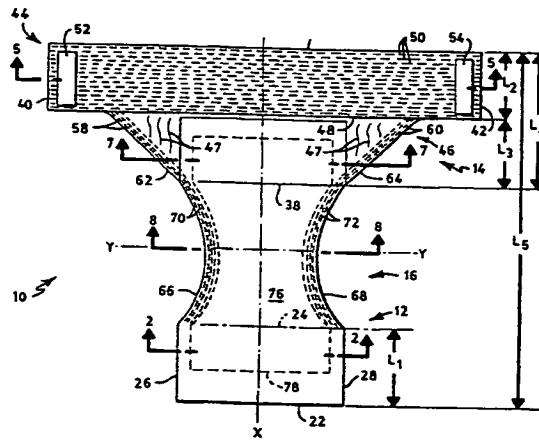
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(54) Title: **ABSORBENT ARTICLE**



## ABSORBENT ARTICLE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5        This invention relates to an absorbent article exhibiting improved body fit. More specifically, this invention relates to a disposable absorbent article having a refastenable mechanism and exhibits improved body fit that reduces the likelihood of fluid leakage.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10       Today, various disposable absorbent articles exist which are designed to absorb and retain body fluid and/or excrement. Examples of such articles include incontinence products such as pants, briefs and undergarments, baby diapers, feminine care menstrual pants, training pants, etc. While most of these articles perform satisfactorily for their  
15       intended purpose, some are difficult to remove from the body of the wearer. Many do not have a refastenable mechanism that allows the article to be easily adjusted during use or be easily removed from the wearer's body before the product is permanently discarded while maintaining an underwear like fit. Some of today's commercially available products do not conform well to the human body and this poor fit increases the likelihood of fluid  
20       leakage while the product is being worn. Therefore, there remains a need for a disposable absorbent article having a refastenable mechanism that will provide improved fit to the human body and reduce the likelihood of fluid leakage.

Now, a disposable absorbent article has been invented which exhibits improved body fit that reduces the likelihood of fluid leakage.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Briefly, this invention relates to an absorbent article exhibiting improved body fit. The absorbent article has a front portion, a back portion and a crotch portion. The back  
30       portion has a first end and a second end. The back portion is divided into a first section and a second section. The first section is located adjacent to the first end and the second section located adjacent to the second end. The first and second sections are extendable in at least one direction. The second section has a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second leg elastics each positioned adjacent to one of the first and second  
35       side edges. A crotch portion connects the front portion to the back portion. The crotch portion has a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second crotch elastics each

positioned adjacent to one of the first and second side edges. The first and second crotch elastics cooperate with the first and second leg elastics to provide a close fit against a wearer's body. The absorbent article also includes an absorbent secured to at least one of the front, back or crotch portions. The absorbent article further includes a fastening 5 mechanism for releasably attaching the back portion to the front portion whereby a pant-like article is formed having a waist opening and a pair of leg openings.

The general object of this invention is to provide an absorbent article exhibiting improved body fit. A more specific object of this invention is to provide a disposable absorbent article having a refastenable mechanism and exhibits improved body fit that 10 reduces the likelihood of fluid leakage.

Another object of this invention is to provide an absorbent article exhibiting improved body fit that is easy to manufacture, is relatively inexpensive and is easy to use. Still another object of this invention is to provide an absorbent article exhibiting improved body fit and which has a refastening mechanism that can easily be adjusted to conform to 15 a wearer's body.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent to those skilled in the art in view of the following description and the accompanying drawings.

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#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a top plane view of an absorbent article exhibiting improved body fit and shown in a pre-assembled flat configuration.

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Fig. 2 is a cross-sectional view of Figure 1 taken along line 2—2.

Fig. 3 is a bottom view of the absorbent article showing an alternative embodiment for the fastening mechanism on the front portion.

Fig. 4 is a cross-sectional view of Figure 3 taken along line 4—4.

Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional view of Figure 1 taken along the line 5—5.

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Fig. 6 is a top view of a portion of the back portion showing an alternative embodiment for the leg elastics.

Fig. 7 is a cross-sectional view of Figure 1 taken along the line 7—7.

Fig. 8 is a cross-sectional view of Figure 1 taken along the line 8—8.

Fig. 9 is a top view of a portion of the back portion showing a third embodiment for the leg elastics.

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Fig. 10 is a top view of an alternative absorbent assembly.

Fig. 11 is a cross-sectional view of Figure 10 taken along line 11—11.

Fig. 12 is a perspective view of the "in use" configuration of the absorbent article shown in Figure 1 once the back portion is releasably attached to the front portion.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

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Referring to Figs. 1 and 2, a disposable absorbent article 10 having a refastenable mechanism is shown. The absorbent article 10 has a longitudinal central axis X—X, a transverse central axis Y—Y and a vertical central axis Z—Z. The absorbent article 10 includes a front portion 12, a back portion 14 and a crotch portion 16. The crotch portion 10 16 connects the front portion 12 to the back portion 14. The front, back and crotch portions 12, 14 and 16 can be formed from a single piece of material or from two or more pieces of material. Each of the front, back and crotch portions 12, 14 and 16 can be a single layer of material or each can be formed as a laminate having two or more layers. In Fig. 2, the front portion 12 is shown as a laminate having an upper layer 18 and a lower 15 layer 20. Preferably, the front, back and crotch portions 12, 14 and 16, respectively, are formed as a laminate having two layers.

When a laminate is utilized, the upper layer 18 faces toward the body of the wearer in use and can be either liquid permeable or liquid-impermeable. A thermoplastic film can be used to make the upper layer 18 liquid-impermeable. The lower layer 20 20 faces away from the body of the wearer in use and it too can either be liquid permeable or liquid-impermeable. Preferably, the lower layer 20 is liquid permeable and is formed from a soft material such as a non-woven. Spunbond is a non-woven material manufactured by Kimberly-Clark Corporation that is soft and pliable and functions well as the lower layer 20. It is beneficial to make one of the layers 18 or 20 liquid-impermeable in the crotch 25 portion 16 so as to prevent body fluid absorbed by the absorbent article 10 from exiting.

The front portion 12, which will be aligned around a portion of the front torso of a wearer's body in use, includes a first end 22, a second end 24, a first side edge 26 and a second side edge 28. The front portion 12 can be constructed such that its lower layer 20 is formed from a material that has fastening qualities. For example, the lower layer 20 30 can be formed from either a hook material or a loop material. The entire front portion 12 can then act as a fastening element and be releasably attached to another member or have another member releasably attached to it. The front portion 12 can also be formed from other materials that have the ability to releasably attach to another member. The lower layer 20 can be an adhesive layer, a co-adhesive layer or have some other 35 properties that allow it to be releasably fastened to another member.

Referring to Figs. 3 and 4, a bottom view of the absorbent article 10 showing an alternative embodiment for the fastening mechanism on the front portion 12. For ease of understanding, the same numerals will be used in Figs. 3 and 4 as were used in Figs. 1 and 2 except for the use of prime numbers for the front portion 12'. The front portion 12' of 5 the absorbent article 10' is formed as a single layer 30 having a surface 32. The surface 32 faces away from the body of the wearer during use. Secured to the surface 32 is a fastener 34. The fastener 34 can be a separate piece or patch of material or it can include two or more distinct pieces. The fastener 34 is a "releasable fastener" having the ability to fasten onto another member or have another member fasten onto it. A 10 "releasable fastener" is one that will permit two members to be fastened and then unfastened multiple times. A "releasable fastener" differs from a "permanent fastener" in that it does not require the bond to be permanently destroyed once the connection is broken. The fastener 34 can be formed from a hook material or from a loop material. The fastener 34 can also be formed from an adhesive, a co-adhesive or from some other kind 15 of material that will allow for a releasable attachment or connection to occur with another member. The purpose of the fastener 34 will be explained shortly.

Returning again to the Fig. 1, the front portion 12 has a length  $L_1$ . The length  $L_1$  is measured parallel to the longitudinal central axis X—X. The length  $L_1$  should be equal to or greater than about 1 inches (about 2.5 cm).

20 Referring now to Figs. 1 and 5, the absorbent article 10 also includes the back portion 14 that will contact the back and sides of a wearer's torso in use. The back portion 14 has a first end 36, a second end 38, and first and second side edges 40 and 42, respectively. The back portion 14 is depicted as a laminate. The laminate includes the upper layer 18 which faces the body of the wearer during use and the lower exterior 25 layer 20 which faces away from the wearer's body during use. The upper layer 18 can be either liquid permeable or liquid-impermeable. Preferably, the upper layer 18 is liquid permeable.

The back portion 14 is divided into a first section 44 and a second section 46. The first section 44 has a length  $L_2$  measured perpendicularly from the first end 36 to a line 30 48 drawn parallel thereto. The length  $L_2$  should be equal to or greater than about 2 inches (about 5 cm). Preferably, for an adult size garment, the length  $L_2$  should range from between about 3 inches to about 7 inches (about 7.6 cm to about 18 cm). Most preferably, for an adult size garment, the length  $L_2$  should range from between about 6 inches to about 7 inches (about 15 cm to about 18 cm).

35 The first section 44 of the back portion 14 should be extendable in the transverse direction so that it can easily stretch to accommodate the anatomy of the wearer's torso.

The "transverse direction" is a direction parallel to the transverse central axis Y—Y of the absorbent article 10. The first section 44 can also be extendable in the X—X and/or Z—Z directions if desired. The first section 44 can be made to be extendable in a number of ways. One way is to construct the first section 44 into gathers, pleats or undulations such 5 that as one pulls on the first and second side edges 40 and 42, respectively, the first section 44 extends in the transverse direction. Another way to make the first section 44 extendable is to form it from an elastic material, an elastic composite or it can contain elastic 50. The first section 44 could also be formed from a material having elastic properties and characteristics. Preferably, the first section 44 is elastic and will be able to 10 stretch and retract like a rubber band. The first section 44 should be capable of extending and retracting multiple times. This ability to extend and retract will allow the refastening mechanism of the absorbent article 10 to be adjusted whenever needed by the wearer.

The first section 44 will exhibit elastic properties if it is formed from a material such as "stretch bonded laminate". A "stretch bonded laminate" is a material that can be used 15 to form the first section 44. Stretch bonded laminate is a material manufactured by Kimberly-Clark Corporation having an office at 401 North Lake Street, Neenah, Wisconsin 54956. Other elastic materials or materials exhibiting elastic properties or characteristics can also be used. Such materials are known to those skilled in the art.

Another way of making the first section 44 elastic is to position and bond one or 20 more elongated elastic strands 50 between the upper and lower layers 18 and 20, respectively. By sandwiching multiple elastic strands 50 between the upper and lower layers 18 and 20, one can adjust the amount of stretch imparted into the first section 44. In Fig. 1, multiple elastic strands 50 are shown. There can be from between about 2 to about 100 elastic strands 50 present in the first section 44. Preferably, there are from 25 between about 10 to about 50 elastic strands 50 present in the first section 50. Most preferably, there are from between about 15 to about 25 elastic strands present in the first section 44. The elastic strands 50 can be in the form of elongated strands, ribbons, bands, strips, etc. The cross-sectional configuration of the elastic strands 50 can vary. The cross-section of the elastic strands 50 can be circular, square, rectangular, oval, etc. 30 The elastic strands 50 preferably will extend transversely across the first section 44 from the first side edge 40 to the second side edge 42. The elastic strands 50 function to cause the first section 44 to securely and snugly contact the back and sides of a wearer's torso and prevent fluid leakage from occurring at or about the waist opening.

As shown in Fig. 1, the elastic strands 50 can be present throughout the entire 35 length  $L_2$  of the first section 44. Likewise, if the first section 44 is made from an elastic material, the elastic material can extend the full length  $L_2$ .

The amount the first section 44 can extend or stretch can vary depending upon the type of disposable absorbent article produced and the size of the person wearing such an article. However, for an incontinence garment designed to be worn by an adult, the first section 44 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 5 25%. Preferably, the first section 44 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 50%. More preferably, the first section 44 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 75%. Most preferably, the first section 44 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction from between about 75% to about 400%. The first section 44 should also be sized so as to fit around from 10 between about 25% to about 80% of a person's torso when in a non-extended condition. Preferably, the first section 44 should also be sized so as to fit around from between about 30% to about 70% of a person's torso when in a non-extended condition. Most preferably, the first section 44 should also be sized so as to fit around from between about 40% to about 60% of a person's torso when in a non-extended condition. This size 15 dimension for the first section 44 will reduce the need for the material forming it to be stretched to an extreme amount when being fitted around a person's torso.

Referring again to Figs. 1-3, the back portion 14 includes a fastening mechanism for releasably attaching it to the front portion 12 such that a pant-like article is formed having a waist opening and a pair of leg openings. The fastening mechanism can include 20 a first fastener 52 and a second fastener 54, each secured to the back portion 14. Each of the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 can be positioned adjacent to one of the first and second side edges 40 and 42, respectively. Each of the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 can be secured by glue, an adhesive, by ultrasonic bonding, by heat, by pressure, by a combination of heat and pressure, by thread, by a mechanical means or by other 25 means known to those skilled in the art. In Figs. 1-3, the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 are depicted as distinctive, discrete members having a rectangular profile. The first and second fasteners 52 and 54 are shown being located slightly inboard of the respective first and second side edges 40 and 42. The size and shape of the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 can vary. Each of the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 is 30 preferably formed of similar material, although each can be made from a different material, if so desired. The first and second fasteners 52 and 54 can be formed from many different types of materials. For example, the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 can be an adhesive, a co-adhesive, a hook material, a loop material, etc. Preferably, the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 are formed from either a hook material or from a 35 loop material since these materials are readily available and inexpensive.

It should be also be recognized that other types of fastening mechanisms can be used to releasably attach the front and back portions 12 and 14 together. Such other fastening mechanisms can include adhesives, co-adhesives, as well as mechanical fasteners, such as buttons and buttonholes, etc. Those skilled in the art are familiar with 5 the various fastening mechanisms that can be utilized.

The first and second fasteners 52 and 54 are constructed such that they are releasably attachable to the front portion 12 or 12'. For example, at least one of the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 can be made from a hook material so that it can be releasably attached to the front portion 12 or 12' that would be formed from a loop 10 material. It is also possible to form at least one of the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 from a loop material so that it can be releasably attached to the front portion 12 or 12' that would be formed from a hook material. The restitching aspect of this invention allows the wearer to easily remove the absorbent article 10 from his or her torso, for example, to go to the bathroom. The restitchable aspect also allows the wearer to 15 release and adjust the fit of the absorbent article 10 against his or her body as required. For example, if the absorbent article 10 appears to be too loose or too tight, the fasteners 52 and 54 can be released and be readjusted.

Referring now to Fig. 6, an alternative embodiment is shown for a fastener 56 which is secured to the first side edge 40 of the first section 44. The fastener 56 is shown 20 as a separate piece of material securely bonded to the first side edge 40 so as to extend outward therefrom. A similar fastener 56 would be present on the second side edge 42 of the first section 44. As explained above for the first and second fasteners 52 and 54, the fastener 56 can be formed from a hook material, a loop material or from some other kind of material. The fastener 56 can be elastic or non-elastic. The fastener 56 can vary in 25 size and shape and how it is permanently secured onto the back portion 14. Preferably, the fastener 56 is either a hook or loop material that can be releasably attachable to the front portion 12 or 12'. It should be noted that the entire surface of each of the fasteners 56 does not have to be formed from a fastening material. Instead, only a portion of the 30 surface can be the fastening element and the remaining portion of the surface can be formed from a non-fastening material.

Referring now to Figs. 1 and 7, the second section 46 of the back portion 14 has a length  $L_3$  measured perpendicularly from the second end 38 to the line 48 drawn parallel to the first end 36. The length  $L_3$  should be equal to or greater than about 1 inch (about 2.5 cm). Preferably, for an adult size garment, the length  $L_3$  should range from between 35 about 3 inches to about 10 inches (about 8 cm to about 25 cm). Most preferably, for an

adult size garment, the length  $L_3$  should range from between about 4 inches to about 8 inches (about 10 cm to about 20 cm).

By designing and manufacturing the absorbent article 10 to have a ratio  $L_2/L_3$ , which ranges from between about 0.1 to about 2, one can improve the body fit of the 5 disposable absorbent article 10. Preferably, the ratio  $L_2/L_3$  ranges from between about 0.2 to about 1.6, and more preferably, the ratio  $L_2/L_3$  ranges from between about 0.3 to about 1.5. By manufacturing the back portion 14 to this desired ratio, one can also minimize fluid leakage.

The amount the second section 46 can extend or stretch can vary depending upon 10 the type of disposable absorbent article produced and the size of the person wearing such an article. However, for an incontinence garment designed to be worn by an adult, the second section 46 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 25%. Preferably, the second section 46 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 40%. More preferably, the second section 46 15 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 50%. Most preferably, the second section 46 should be capable of extending in the transverse direction from between about 25% to about 150%.

The second section 46 may or may not contain elastic 50 that extends 20 transversely thereacross. The second section 46 will contain rugosities 47, preferably a multitude of rugosities. The rugosities 47 are wrinkles or creases that give the second section 46 an undulating or ridged appearance. Pleats, folds, gathers or other means of overlapping the material forming the second section 46 can also be used, if desired. The rugosities 47 allow the material forming the second section 46 to be stretched or extended in at least the transverse direction. Preferably, the material forming the second section 46 25 will be extendable in more than one direction, for example, in the longitudinal and transverse directions as well as in the z-direction. As the material forming the second section 46 extends, the rugosities 47 will extend to a planar orientation.

The rugosities 47 can be aligned parallel to or at an angle to the longitudinal 30 central axis X—X of the absorbent article 10. If aligned at an angle, the angle can vary from 0 to 90 degrees relative to the longitudinal central axis X—X.

The second section 46 has first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 that are aligned adjacent to first and second edges 62 and 64. Preferably, the line 48 will intersect at a point where the first and second edges 62 and 64 meet the first and second edges 40 and 42, respectively. The first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 can include one or more 35 elastic strands, ribbons, bands or strips that are arranged approximately parallel to the first and second edges 62 and 64, respectively. Preferably, there are from between about

1 to about 6 elongated elastic strands making up each leg elastic 58 and 60. Most preferably, each of the leg elastics 58 and 60 contains three elastic strands. The elastic strands can be aligned parallel to one another. For good results, the leg elastics 58 and 60 should be positioned inward about 1 inch (about 2.5 cm) from the first and second edges 62 and 64, respectively. More preferably, the leg elastics 58 and 60 should be positioned inward about .75 inches (about 2 cm) from the first and second edges 62 and 64, respectively. Most preferably, the leg elastics 58 and 60 should be positioned inward about .5 inches (about 1.3 cm) from the first and second edges 62 and 64.

The first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 are shown extending from the line 48 to the second end 38 of the back portion 14. One should note that the exact location of the line 48 would dictate whether the leg elastics 58 and 60 are completely contained within the second section 46 or if they extend into the first section 44. In one embodiment, see Fig. 1, the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 are located adjacent to at least one of the multiple elastic strands 50 present in the first section 44. In a second embodiment, see Fig. 6, each of the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 extend to one of the first and second side edges 40 and 42, respectively, of the first section 44. The first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 do not actually intersect or contact one of the multiple elastic strands 50 but will be aligned in close proximity to the elastic strands 50. This will allow the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 to extend in at least the transverse direction as the elastic strands 50 are stretched in the transverse direction. Preferably, the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 will extend in the x-direction and in the y-direction as the elastic strands 50 are stretched in the transverse direction.

Referring again to Fig. 6, the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 can extend out to the first and second side edges 40 and 42 of the first section 44, if desired. The leg elastics 58 and 60 function to gather the material from which the second section 46 is formed at a location adjacent to the leg openings. The leg openings are formed as the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 are releasably attached to the front portion 12 to form a pant-like article. Various types of elastics can be used to form the leg elastics 58 and 60. The leg elastics 58 and 60 should have a tension of from between about 10 grams to about 400 grams. Preferably, the leg elastics 58 and 60 should have a tension of from between about 50 grams to about 220 grams. More preferably, the leg elastics 58 and 60 should have a tension of from between about 80 grams to about 200 grams.

Referring to Figs. 1 and 8, the absorbent article 10 also includes the crotch portion 16. The crotch portion 16 connects the front portion 12 to the back portion 14. As noted above, the front portion 12, back portion 14 and the crotch portion 16 can all be part of a single sheet of material. The crotch portion 16 has a first side edge 66 and a second side

edge 68 and can have an hourglass, rectangular, square, oval or some other configuration. Each of the side edges 66 and 68 can be straight and aligned parallel or non-parallel to one another. The side edges 66 and 68 can also be curved, arcuate, irregular, convex or concave in shape. Preferably, the side edges 66 and 68 are arcuate in shape with the narrowest distance between the side edges 66 and 68 occurring along the transverse centerline Y—Y.

The crotch portion 16 can be a single layer or a laminate, as depicted. Since the crotch portion 16 acts as a baffle to body fluid that is absorbed by the absorbent article 10, it should be liquid-impermeable. If the crotch portion 16 is a laminate, at least one of the 10 layers forming the laminate should be liquid-impermeable. Polypropylene, polyethylene, or any other thermoplastic material works well as a liquid-impermeable layer. Preferably, the crotch portion 16 is a laminate formed from a layer of thermoplastic film and a layer of non-woven material. The non-woven material can be spunbond. Spunbond is a non-woven material manufactured and commercial sold by Kimberly-Clark Corporation having 15 an office at 401 North Lake Street, Neenah, Wisconsin 54956.

The crotch portion 16 also includes first and second crotch elastics 70 and 72, respectively. The crotch elastics 70 and 72 are located adjacent to the first and second side edges 66 and 68, respectively. The crotch elastics 70 and 72 are preferably contoured to match the profile of the side edges 66 and 68. The crotch elastics 70 and 72 20 are located inward about 1 inch (about 2.5 cm) of the first and second side edges 66 and 68, respectively. Preferably, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 are located inward about .75 inches (about 2 cm) of the first and second side edges 66 and 68, respectively. More preferably, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 are located inward about .5 inches (about 1.3 cm) of the first and second side edges 66 and 68, respectively.

25 The crotch elastics 70 and 72 should have a tension of from between about 10 grams to about 400 grams. Preferably, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 should have a tension of from between about 50 grams to about 220 grams. More preferably, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 should have a tension of from between about 80 grams to about 200 grams.

30 The crotch elastics 70 and 72 can include one or more elongated elastic strands, ribbons or strips. Preferably, each of said first and second crotch elastics 70 and 72 includes at least two strands of elastics, and more preferably, at least three strands of elastics. The strands of each of the crotch elastics 70 and 72 can be aligned parallel to one another or they can be aligned in a non-parallel relationship, if so desired. A parallel 35 alignment is preferred. The strands of each of the crotch elastics 70 and 72 can be spaced fairly close together, for example, within a millimeter of each other. The exact

spacing can be adjusted depending on the size of the article, the width of the crotch portion 16, the strength of the crotch elastics 70 and 72, the material from which the absorbent article 10 is constructed, etc.

Referring to Figs. 7 and 8, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 can be positioned and secured between the layers 18 and 20 forming the laminate, similar to that shown in Fig. 7. Alternatively, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 can be adhered to an upper surface 74 of the upper layer 18 of the laminate, see Fig. 8. Preferably, the first and second crotch elastics 70 and 72 are bonded to the upper surface 74 of the upper layer 18 by an adhesive.

Referring to Figs. 1, 6 and 9, three different embodiments for the elastic strands 50, the leg elastics 58 and 60 and the crotch elastics 70 and 72 are shown. In Fig. 1, one end of the leg elastics 58 and 60 abuts the elastic strands 50 approximate the line 48. An opposite end of each of the leg elastics 58 and 60 terminate at the second end 38 of the back portion 14, and abut an end of each of the crotch elastics 70 and 72. The important aspect is that the leg elastics 58 and 60 cooperate with the elastic strands 50 and the crotch elastics 70 and 72 to provide a close fit against the wearer's body. This fit will occur around the crotch area and around both leg openings.

In Fig. 6, an alternative configuration is depicted wherein the leg elastic 58 continues to the first side edge 40 of the first section 44. The leg elastic 60 on the opposite side of the absorbent article 10, not shown, would continue to the second side edge 42. In Fig. 9, a third embodiment is depicted wherein one end of the leg elastic 58 is spaced apart from the elastic strands 50 by a gap, denoted  $G_1$ . The opposite end of the leg elastic 58 is spaced apart from an end of the crotch elastic 70 by a gap, denoted  $G_2$ . The gaps  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  should be less than about 1 inch (about 2.5 cm) apart. Preferably, the gaps  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  should be less than about .5 inch (about 1.3 cm) apart, and more preferably, the gaps  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  should be less than about .4 inch (about 1 cm) apart. The gaps  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  are measured when the absorbent article 10 is laid flat and in an extended condition.

It should be noted that the ends of the leg elastics 58 and 60 can be spaced apart from, be abutting, or overlap the elastic strands 50 and an end of the crotch elastics 70 and 72. It is also possible to run or extend the leg elastics 58 and 60 out to the first and second side edges 40 and 42 of the first section 44. In this case, the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 can be aligned parallel to the elastic strands 50. Furthermore, it is possible to construct the leg elastics 58 and 60 and the crotch elastics 70 and 72 such that one is an extension of the other. In other words, the leg elastic 58 and the crotch

elastic 70 would be the same piece of elastic. Similarly, the leg elastic 60 and the crotch elastic 72 would be the same piece of elastic.

The tension in the leg elastics 58 and 60 can be made to be less than, equal to or greater than the tension in the crotch elastics 70 and 72 or the tension in the elastic strands 50. Preferably, the tension in the leg elastics 58 and 60 will be greater than the tension in the crotch elastics 70 and 72. Furthermore, the tension in the elastic strands 50 can be equal to, less than or greater than the tension in either the leg elastics 58 and 60 or the crotch elastics 70 and 72. Preferably, the tension in the elastic strands 50 will be greater than the tension in either the leg elastics 58 and 60 or the crotch elastics 70 and 72.

Returning again to the back portion 14, it should be noted that the interaction of the elastic strands 50, the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 and the first and second crotch elastics 70 and 72 will allow the absorbent article 10 to properly fit the wearer's body. As the side edges 40 and 42 are pulled apart, the elastic strands 50 will stretch in the horizontal or x-direction. As this occurs, the second section 44 will expand in the x and y directions and the rugosities 47 will flatten out. This action will cause the leg elastics 58 and 60 to be extended outward in the x and y directions. As the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 extend, they will create a tension on the crotch elastics 70 and 72 and cause them to stretch as well. It should be noted that the crotch elastics 70 and 72 would not extend to the same extent as the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60. The extension of the elastic strands 50, the first and second leg elastics 58 and 60 and the first and second crotch elastics 70 and 72 will create what are known as "lines of fit". The "lines of fit" assure that adequate pressure is applied against the waist, legs and crotch regions of the wearer's body to prevent body fluid from leaking from the absorbent article 10.

Referring again to Figs. 1, 2, 7 and 8, the absorbent article 10 can include a liquid permeable liner 76. The liquid permeable liner 76 is also referred to as a bodyside cover. The liner 76 is not required but the absorbent article 10 will be described as including the liner 76. The liquid permeable liner 76, when present, can be formed from any natural or synthetic material that is liquid permeable. The liquid permeable liner 76 can also be formed from a non-woven material. Spunbond is a good material from which to construct the liquid permeable liner 76.

The bodyside liner 76 can be secured to at least one of the front, back or crotch portions 12, 14 or 16. The bodyside liner 76 is shown being directly attached to the crotch portion 16 in Fig. 8. Alternatively, the bodyside liner 76 can be indirectly attached to the crotch portion 16 via one or more layers. In this case, the intermediate layer would be

secured to at least one of the front, back or crotch portions 12, 14 or 16. For example, the bodyside liner 76 could be secured to a liquid-impermeable baffle, that is then adhesively secured to the crotch portion 16.

In Fig. 1, the periphery of the bodyside liner 76 and the periphery of the crotch portion 16 are shown to be coterminous. When the crotch elastics 70 and 72 are positioned on the upper surface 74 of the laminate, see Fig. 8, they can be adhesively secured to the bodyside liner 76 such that they are arranged adjacent to the side edges 66 and 68 of the crotch portion 16.

The absorbent article 10 further includes an absorbent 78 positioned below the liquid permeable liner 76. The absorbent 78 can be in direct contact with the upper layer 18 of the crotch portion 16. The absorbent 78 is designed to absorb body fluid, especially urine and can include one or more layers of absorbent material. The layers can be constructed of similar or different materials. Suitable materials for the absorbent 78 include cellulose, wood pulp fluff, rayon, cotton, and meltblown polymers such as polyester, polypropylene or coform. Coform is a meltblown air-formed combination of meltblown polymers, such as polypropylene, and absorbent staple fibers, such as cellulose. A preferred material is wood pulp fluff, for it is low in cost, relatively easy to form and has great absorbency. It should be noted that if two or more layers are utilized, that it is not necessary that all the layers be formed from the same material or have the same density.

The absorbent 78 can also be formed from a composite comprised of a hydrophilic material that can be formed from various natural or synthetic fibers, wood pulp fibers, regenerated cellulose or cotton fibers, or a blend of pulp and other fibers. A preferred material is airlaid tissue.

It is also possible and sometimes advantageous to insert a superabsorbent material into the absorbent 78 so as to increase its ability to absorb a large amount of fluid in relation to its own weight. Typical superabsorbents used in absorbent articles such as incontinence garments and diapers can absorb more than 10 times their weight in body fluid. The superabsorbent material can be inserted as particles, fibers or in sheet form. Hydroxyfunctional polymers have been found to be good superabsorbents for disposable absorbent articles. Such superabsorbents are commercially available from The Dow Chemical Company, Stockhausen, Inc., as well as other companies. Two such superabsorbents are DRYTECH® 2035 M and FAVOR® SXM 880. DRYTECH® is a registered trademark of The Dow Chemical Company having an office at 2030 Dow Center, Midland, Michigan 48642. FAVOR® is a registered trademark of Stockhausen, Inc. having an office at 2401 Doyle Street, Greensboro, North Carolina 27406. The

superabsorbent can be a partially neutralized salt of cross-linked copolymers of polyacrylic acid. Other types of superabsorbent materials known to those skilled in the art can also be used.

Referring now to Figs. 10 and 11, an absorbent assembly 80 is depicted which 5 includes, from top to bottom, a liquid permeable bodyside liner 76, one or more layers of an absorbent 78, one layer being shown, and a liquid-impermeable baffle 82. The liquid-impermeable baffle 82 can be formed from a thin layer of thermoplastic material such as polyethylene or polypropylene. The baffle 82 can also be formed from other kinds of liquid-impermeable material. Preferably, the baffle 82 is formed from a liquid- 10 impermeable film. It should be noted that the baffle 82 could be formed from a laminate wherein at least one of the layers is liquid-impermeable.

In the absorbent assembly 80, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 are sandwiched between the liner 76 and the baffle 82. The crotch elastics 70 and 72 can be held in place by a glue, an adhesive, by ultrasonics, by heat, by pressure, by a combination of heat and 15 pressure, or by some other bonding mechanism known to those skilled in the art. It is also possible to secure the crotch elastics 70 and 72 to the lower or exterior surface of the baffle 82 if desired. For good results, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 should be positioned within about 1 inch (about 2.5 cm) from the respective side edge 66 and 68. More 20 preferably, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 should be positioned within about .75 inches (about 2 cm) from the respective side edge 66 and 68. Most preferably, the crotch elastics 70 and 72 should be positioned within about .5 inches (about 1.3 cm) from the respective side edge 66 and 68.

The absorbent assembly 80 can be placed or positioned on or over the crotch portion 16 of the absorbent article 10 and can be retained in place by an adhesive or 25 some other type of fastener. Since the baffle 82 is liquid-impermeable, the crotch portion 16 would not have to be constructed from a liquid-impermeable material. The absorbent assembly 80 can be either permanently or releasably secured to at least one of the front, back or crotch portions 12, 14 or 16 of the absorbent article 10. Preferably, the absorbent assembly 80 is secured to the crotch portion 16 by an adhesive. Alternatively, the 30 absorbent assembly 80 can actually serve as the front and crotch portions, 12 and 16 respectively, of the absorbent article 10.

Referring now to Figs. 1 and 12, the first and second fasteners 52 and 54 are releasably attached to the front portion 12 to form a pant-like article 84. The pant-like article 84 has a waist-opening 86 and a pair of first and second leg openings 88 and 90. 35 The leg elastic 58, the crotch elastic 70, and possibly the elastic first section 44 can cooperate to form gathers 92 around the first leg opening 88. Likewise, the leg elastic 60,

the crotch elastic 72, and possibly the elastic first section cooperate to form gathers 94 around the second leg opening 90. It should be noted that the absorbent article 10 could be sold in either the flat, unassembled condition, as shown in Fig. 1, or in the assembled condition, as is shown in Fig. 12.

5 Referring again to Fig. 1, the back portion 14 of the absorbent article 10 has been described with reference to a first section 44 and a second section 46. The first section 44 has a length  $L_2$  and the second section 46 has a length  $L_3$ , both measured parallel to the longitudinal central axis X—X. The combination of the length  $L_2$  and the length  $L_3$  equals a new length  $L_4$ . The length  $L_4$  should range from between about 3 inches (about 10 7.5 cm) to about 25 inches (about 64 cm). Preferably, for an adult size garment, the length  $L_4$  should range from between about 7 inches to about 17 inches (about 18 cm to about 43 cm). Most preferably, for an adult size garment, the length  $L_4$  should range from between about 10 inches to about 15 inches (about 25 cm to about 38 cm).

10 In addition, the absorbent article 10 has an overall length  $L_5$  measured 15 perpendicularly from the first end 22 of the front portion 12 to the first end 36 of the back portion 14. The length  $L_5$  should range from between about 10 inches (about 25 cm) to about 45 inches (about 114 cm). Preferably, for an adult size garment, the length  $L_5$  should range from between about 20 inches (about 51 cm) to about 40 inches (about 102 cm). Most preferably, for an adult size garment, the length  $L_5$  should range from 20 between about 30 inches (about 76 cm) to about 35 inches (about 89 cm).

25 A ratio  $L_4/L_5$  can be established which ranges from between about 0.1 to about 0.5. Preferably, the ratio  $L_4/L_5$  ranges from between about 0.2 to about 0.5 and more preferably, the ratio  $L_4/L_5$  ranges from between about 0.3 to about 0.4. By designing and manufacturing the absorbent article 10 to fit within the values established for the ratio  $L_4/L_5$ , one can be confident that the absorbent article 10 will exhibit improved body fit and be less likely to leak body fluid.

30 While the invention has been described in conjunction with several specific embodiments, it is to be understood that many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the foregoing description. Accordingly, this invention is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

We claim:

1. An absorbent article comprising:
  - a) a front portion;
  - b) a back portion having a first end and a second end, said back portion being divided into a first section and a second section, said first section located adjacent to said first end and said second section located adjacent to said second end, said first and second sections being extendable in at least one direction, and said second section having a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second leg elastics each positioned adjacent to one of said first and second side edges;
  - c) a crotch portion connecting said front portion to said back portion, said crotch portion having a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second crotch elastics each positioned adjacent to one of said first and second side edges, said first and second crotch elastics cooperating with said first and second leg elastics to provide a close fit against a wearer's body;
  - d) an absorbent secured to at least one of said front, back or crotch portions; and
  - e) means for releasably attaching said back portion to said front portion whereby a pant-like article is formed having a waist opening and a pair of leg openings.
2. The absorbent article of claim 1 wherein said first section is elastic.
3. The absorbent article of claim 1 wherein said first section has a first side edge and a second side edge, and said first section includes multiple elastic strands that extend from said first side edge to said second side edge.
4. The absorbent article of claim 3 wherein said first and second leg elastics are located adjacent to at least one of said multiple elastic strands.
5. The absorbent article of claim 1 wherein said absorbent article has a longitudinal central axis and a transverse central axis and said first and second sections are extendable in a transverse direction.

6. The absorbent article of claim 5 wherein said first section is capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 25%.
7. The absorbent article of claim 5 wherein said second section is capable of extending in the transverse direction by at least about 25%.
8. The absorbent article of claim 5 wherein said second section contains rugosities aligned at an angle to said longitudinal central axis.
9. The absorbent article of claim 1 wherein each of said first and second crotch elastics abut one of said first and second leg elastics.
10. An absorbent article comprising:
  - a) a front portion;
  - b) a back portion having a first end and a second end, said back portion being divided into a first section and a second section, said first section located adjacent to said first end and said second section located adjacent to said second end, said first section being elastic and said second section containing rugosities, said first and second sections being extendable in at least one direction, and said second section having a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second leg elastics each positioned adjacent to one of said first and second side edges;
  - c) a crotch portion connecting said front portion to said back portion, said crotch portion having a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second crotch elastics each positioned adjacent to one of said first and second side edges, said first and second crotch elastics cooperating with said first and second leg elastics to provide a close fit against a wearer's body;
  - d) a liquid permeable liner secured to at least one of said front, back or crotch portions;
  - e) an absorbent positioned below said liner; and
  - f) means for releasably attaching said back portion to said front portion whereby a pant-like article is formed having a waist opening and a pair of leg openings.

11. The absorbent article of claim 10 wherein each of said first and second leg elastics are spaced apart from one of said first and second crotch elastics.
12. The absorbent article of claim 11 wherein an end of each of said first and second crotch elastics are located adjacent to an end of one of said first and second leg elastics and an opposite end of each of said first and second leg elastics are located adjacent to at least one of said multiple elastic strands included in said first section.  
5
13. The absorbent article of claim 10 wherein said absorbent article has a longitudinal central axis and a transverse central axis and said first section is extendable in a transverse direction by at least 50% and said second section is extendable in a transverse direction by at least 25%.
14. The absorbent article of claim 13 wherein said rugosities are aligned at an angle to said longitudinal central axis and said rugosities are extendable to a planar orientation as said first section is extended.
15. An absorbent article comprising:
  - a) a front portion;
  - b) a back portion having a first end and a second end, said back portion being divided into a first section and a second section, said first section located adjacent to said first end and said second section located adjacent to said second end, said first section having a first side edge and a second side edge and including multiple elastic strands that extend between said first and second side edges, said second section having a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second leg elastics each positioned adjacent to one of said first and second side edges, said second section containing rugosities, and said first and second sections being extendable in at least one direction;  
5
  - c) a crotch portion connecting said front portion to said back portion, said crotch portion having a first side edge, a second side edge and first and second crotch elastics each positioned adjacent to one of said first and second side edges, said first and second crotch elastics cooperating with said first and second leg elastics to provide a close fit against a wearer's body;  
10
- 15

20

- d) a liquid permeable liner secured to at least one of said front, back or crotch portions;
- e) an absorbent positioned below said liner; and
- f) means for releasably attaching said back portion to said front portion whereby a pant-like article is formed having a waist opening and a pair of leg openings.

16. The absorbent article of claim 15 wherein each of said first and second leg elastics abut an end of one of said first and second crotch elastics.

17. The absorbent article of claim 15 wherein said absorbent article has a longitudinal central axis and a transverse central axis and said first and second sections are extendable in a transverse direction by at least 25%.

18. The absorbent article of claim 17 wherein said first section is extendable in a transverse direction by at least 50%.

19. The absorbent article of claim 17 wherein said second section is extendable in a transverse direction by at least 40%.

20. The absorbent article of claim 17 wherein said rugosities are aligned at an angle to said longitudinal central axis and said rugosities are extendable to a planar orientation as said first section is extended.

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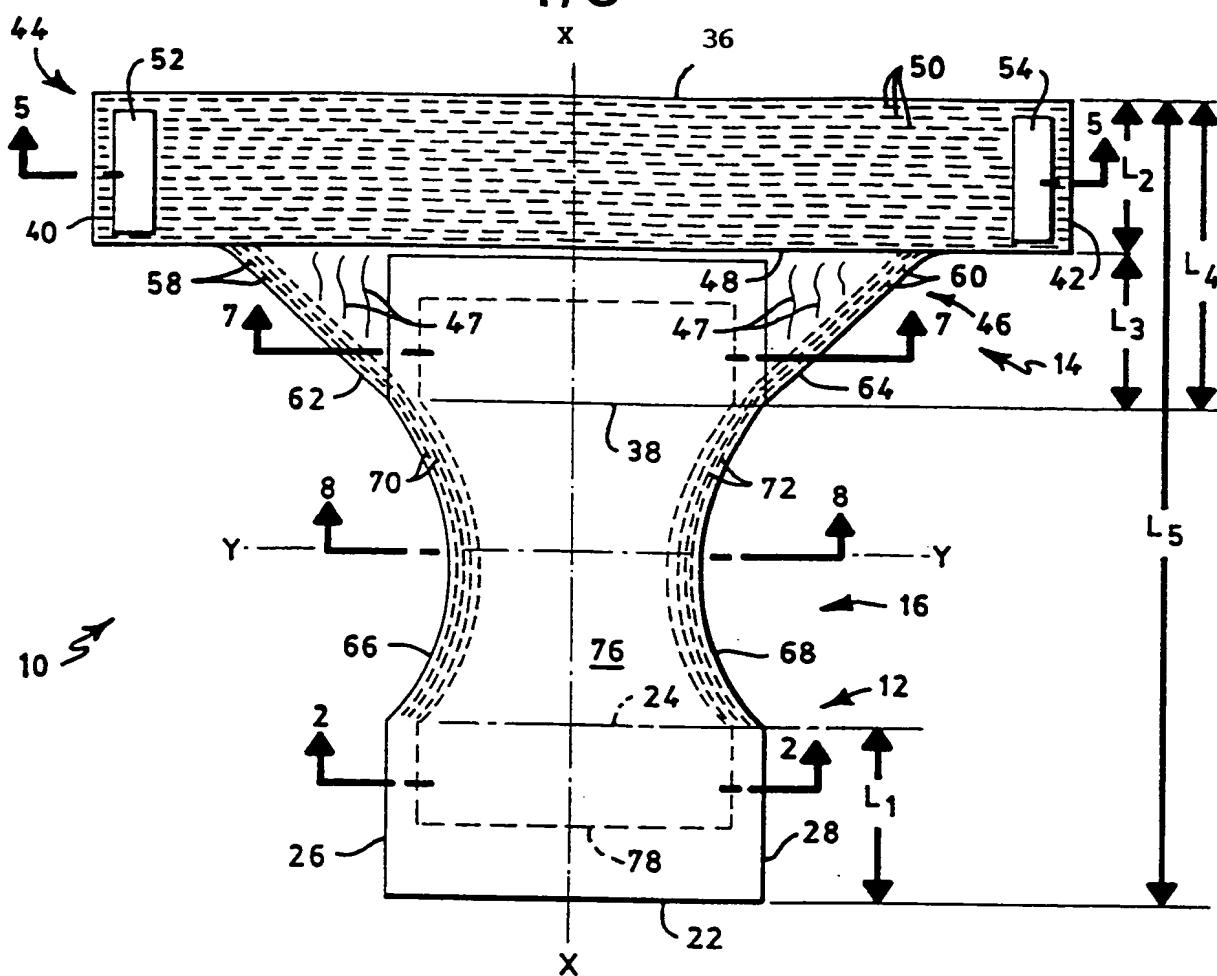


FIG. 1

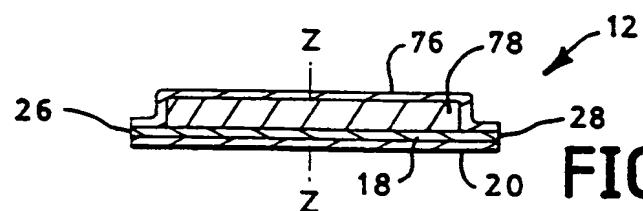


FIG. 2

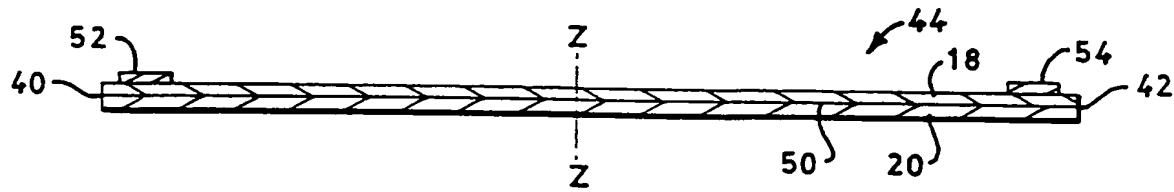


FIG. 5

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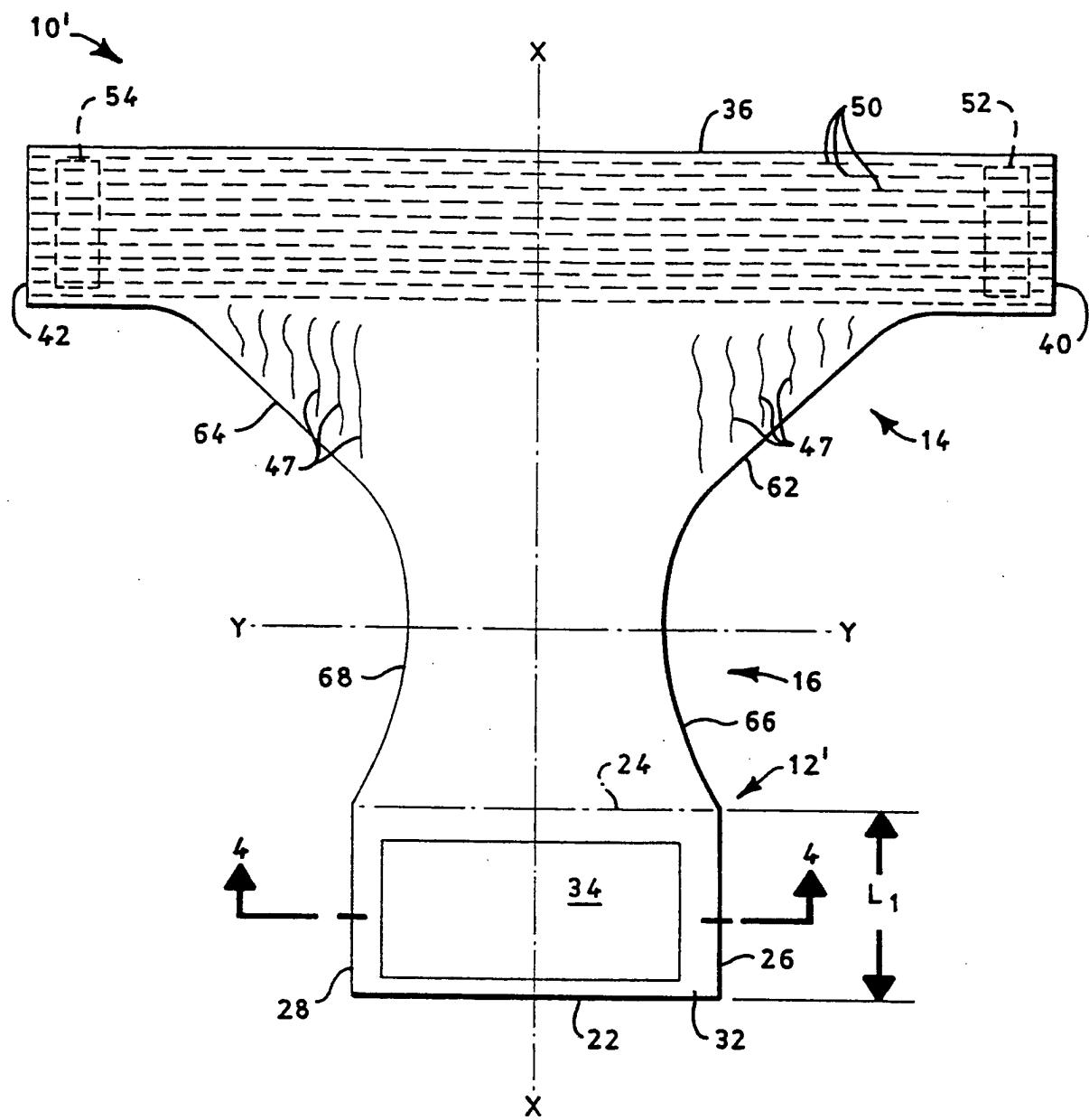


FIG. 3

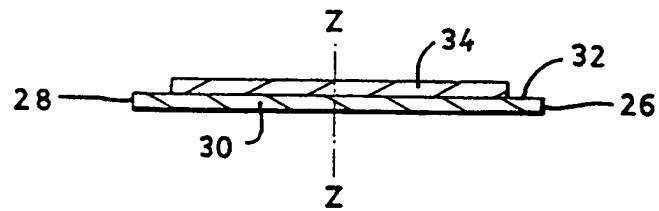


FIG. 4

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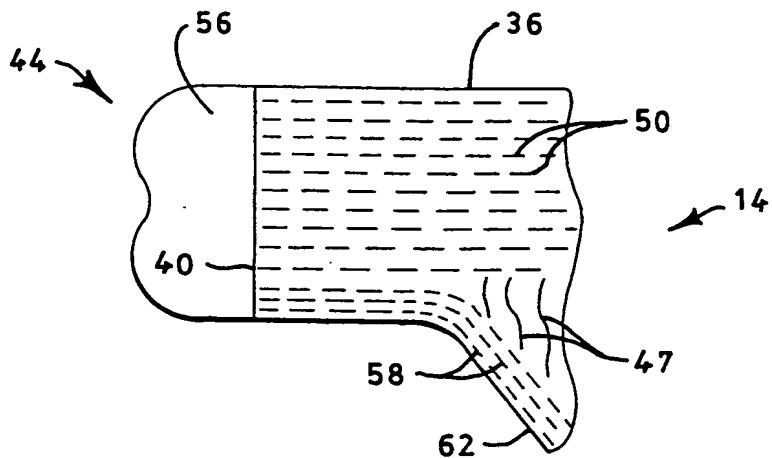


FIG. 6

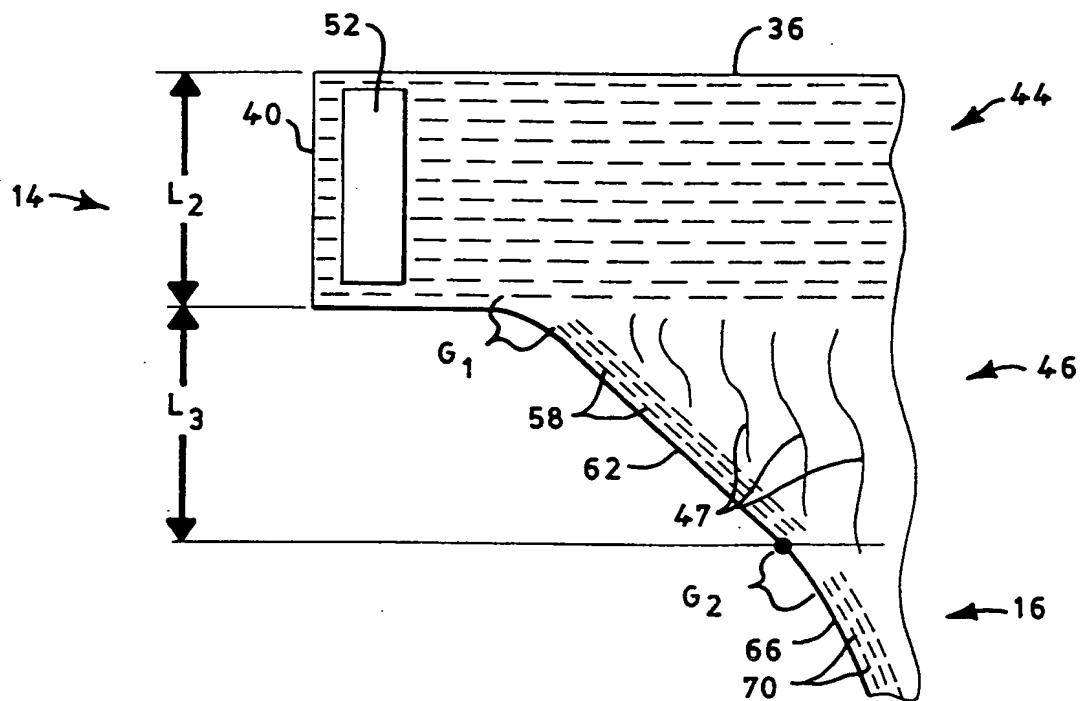


FIG. 9

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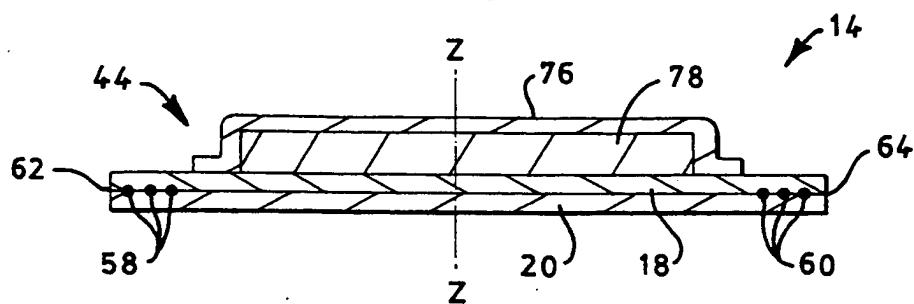


FIG. 7

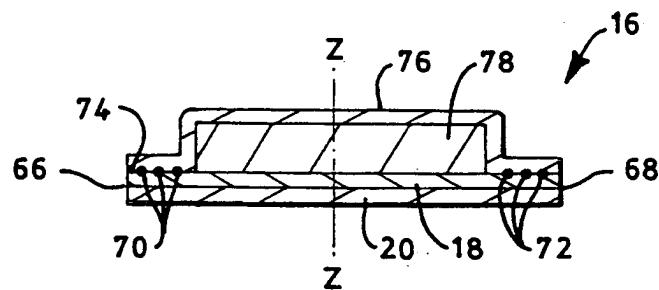


FIG. 8

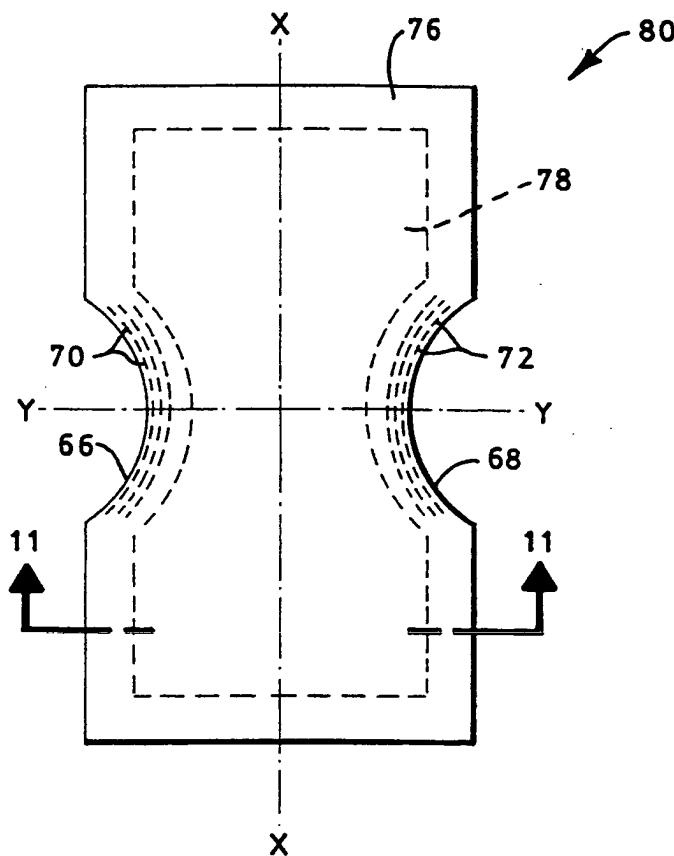


FIG. 10

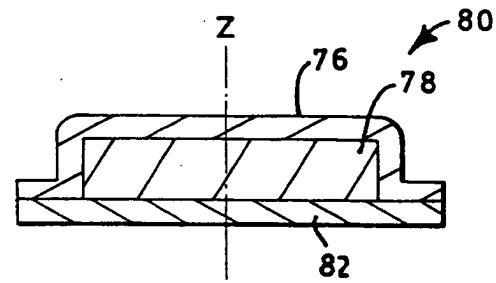


FIG. 11

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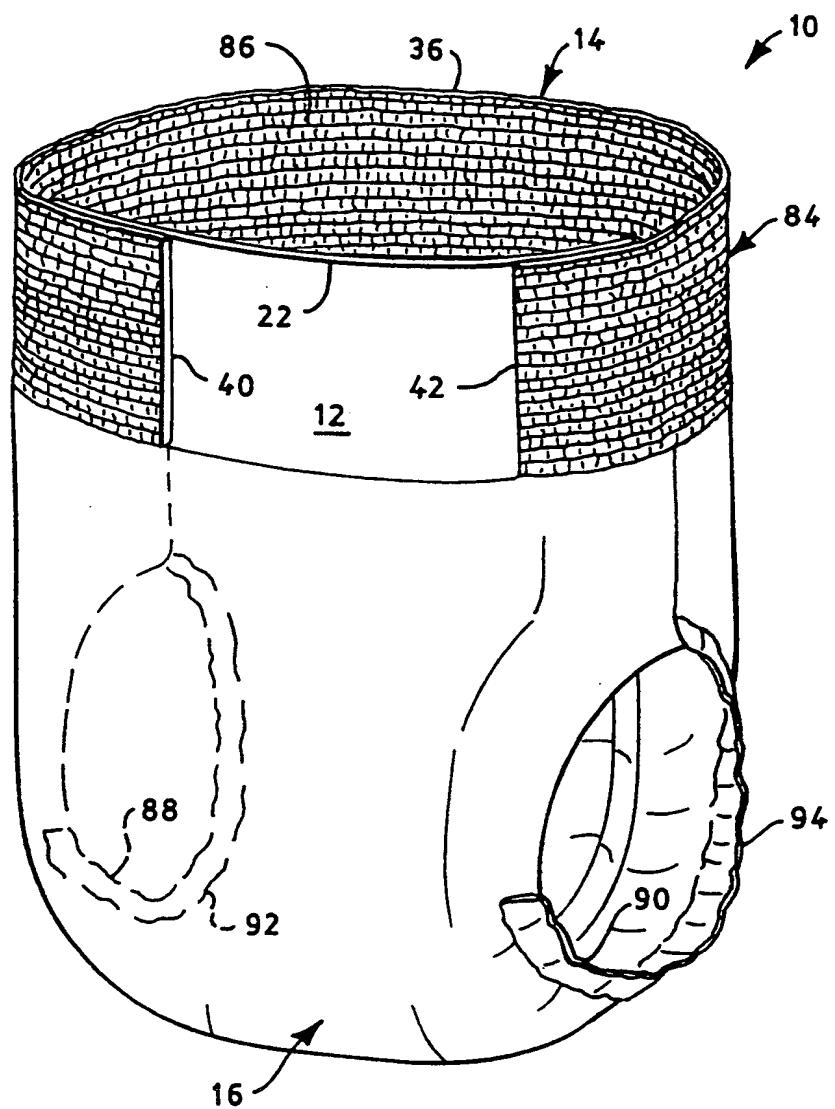


FIG. 12

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Internal Application No  
PCT/US 00/23095

**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER**  
IPC 7 A61F13/15

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

**B. FIELDS SEARCHED**

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)  
IPC 7 A61F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

**C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT**

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 321 985 A (KIMBERLY CLARK CO) 28 June 1989 (1989-06-28)  abstract; figures column 4, line 54 -column 5, line 22 ---	1,2,5-8, 10, 13-15, 17-20
X	WO 96 11657 A (KAO CORP ;KURAHASHI MASAO (JP); KAWAGUCHI HARUKO (JP); TOYODA HARU) 25 April 1996 (1996-04-25) abstract; figures page 13, line 11 - line 25 ---	1-20
A	WO 97 36566 A (PROCTER & GAMBLE) 9 October 1997 (1997-10-09) claims; figures ---	1-20  -/-

Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

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- \*&\* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

14 November 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

27/11/2000

Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2  
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk  
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl.  
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Mirza, A

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Internal Application No

PCT/US 00/23095

## C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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A	US 4 205 679 A (BROOKS RALPH H JR ET AL) 3 June 1980 (1980-06-03) claims; figures ---	1-20
A	US 4 906 243 A (DRAVLAND MARY) 6 March 1990 (1990-03-06) claims; figures -----	1-20

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Internal Application No

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